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ABSTRACT

Two questions must be asked by educators when assessing their role: How should opportunity, access, and democratic intent be used to further the fullest development of each individual to the limits of his or her potential? How do our institutions, in particular, our schools, play a role in facilitating that development? These questions are especially relevant to the problem of equal rights for women in a society in which the number of women in the schools and in the work force is increasing. In the light of these trends, college education for women is becoming more of a necessity, and it is necessary to examine our institutional objectives in terms of their relevance to women. Adult education programs especially need to be examined since from 60 percent to 80 percent of the students in these classes are female. (DS)

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The Educator's Role in Equal Rights

A Panel

The final presentation

of the

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by

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I have found it interesting to look back at my role in last year's AEE Conference at Asilomar, when I was a member of the final Conference panel. I considered the meaning of the invitation to take the role of moderator in this year's final panel. Many of you have commented generously on my "future-tripping" fantasy into 1997 last year. And in preparing for this morning's panel, I became convinced that I ought not compete either with myself or with my eminent panel partners this year. Perhaps the Conference Planning Committee thought the same thing and helped me "get off the hook" by designating me "moderator".

So I decided to define my "moderator" role, in a somewhat straight forward way, as having four components: introduction, information, interjection, and, finally, a bit of inspiration.

By way of introduction, first the subject, then the panelists.

The subject we have been asked to address, "The Educator's Role in Equal Rights", gives us all an opportunity to bring to center stage some of the most critical and important issues in our personal, professional, and political lives. In some small way, the prominent position given this issue on our final morning together is an attempt by AEE to be self-critical and consciousness-raising, as we sip our coffee in this beautiful (although sexist) non-ERA State.

Now, don't get me wrong. I don't believe that "Equal Rights" is to be narrowly defined as a women's issue only. It is clearly - a men's issue, a black's issue, a Chicano's issue, a Puerto Rican's issue, a Jew's issue, a gay's issue, and even a children's issue - in short, Equal Rights is a human issue. Those legal, cultural, and individual guarantees in our Constitution - for all persons in this nation - are hardly a subject of debate. They are, indeed, the very cornerstones of our freedom, of our institutions, and of our lives.

What is the question, then? Surely not opportunity. Surely not access. Surely not democratic intent. What the question now is for educators, for us, is this:

> "How will opportunity, access, and democratic intent now be used to further the fullest development of each individual to the limits of his or her potential?"

and, secondly,

> "How do our institutions, in particular, our schools, play a role in facilitating that development?"

In short,

> "What is the quality of our equality?"

Each of us on the panel this morning has particular feelings about this issue. We differ. We have varying levels of expertise. We come from different backgrounds, different perspectives, different experiences, and different points of view. We are diverse in age and sex and have experienced different personal histories. And so, we intend to share our diversity with you, partly in hopes that we can model and demonstrate the value of diversity, and partly because "That's where we're coming from". Diverse is what we are. It is our authenticity. Therefore, it is our quality.

Our format will be this. Each person - Doug, Mary, and I - will introduce ourselves. We will define ourselves for you as each of us sees ourself. Then, each of us will make a brief statement on some aspect of the topic, with which each of us feels most comfortable - that which has grown out of our own individual experience and life. Then, we hope to share our conversation and discussion with you - and ask you to join in that discussion. And, finally, I will attempt an approptiate conclusion - moving us on to the AEE business we must address this morning before you all either fall asleep or run off to your airplanes.

Doug will begin. I will follow. And then Mary.

Section II

So that you will know where I'm coming from, I'd like to introduce myself. I am a person of six careers and more than twice as many jobs. For the past eight years, I have been the Director of the University Without Walls Program at Loretto Heights College in Denver and I've been active in a wide array of non-traditional higher education efforts and organizations. The UWW is an individualized undergraduate BA degree program for adult learners - average age 36, 80% female. My background includes careers as a Speech Therapist, a clinic administrator, a college professor in the fields of speech and sociology in both public and private institutions, a civil rights and human relations organizer, and a Community Development Director.

I have three grown children in college and one transitioning husband. I grew up in Newark, New Jersey and apparently defined my feminism at age 12 when I decided to apply to a woman's college. At Mount Holyoke, in the early '50's, I learned about excellence and service and leadership, and determined that women's lives had to be lived juggling career, marriage, motherhood, and volunteerism.

My driving interests have always been in "how people learn and how institutions change". I have never waivered from my compulsive commitment to justice.

What I want to share with you this morning is a portion of an article I am writing about the "Organizing Principles for Program Design based on Adult Development and Learning Interests". This section is called, "Women: Some Special Needs and Considerations".

WOMEN: SOME SPECIAL NEEDS AND CONSIDERATIONS

In the 1977-78 academic year, 93% of the enrollment increases in community colleges, four year colleges, and universities were attributed to women.[18] Most of these women students were in the "non-traditional" adult age groups, beyond the age of 22. It would seem unwise then, not to consider the special needs of women when discussing programs in higher education. Informal reports from colleagues in other adult programs testify to the fact that their student populations are usually from 60% to 80% female. Program design for adults in colleges, therefore, substantially means program design for female adults. And, since much of the research and literature on adult development and adult learning has been conducted with predominatly male populations, one must monitor the conclusions reached by these studies when applying their results to women.

First, we must recognize the major impacts that the women's movement has had on the life styles and patterns of women's lives over the past ten years. This impact is significant for all of us. Even if in the late sixties and early seventies this movement was perceived as "fringy" and somewhat radical in its goals and strategies, no one can doubt that as the seventies draw to a close, almost every American family will have somehow been touched by the issues raised. Most notable among these issues are those having to do with women's roles and the "juggling acts" and sequences of marriage, motherhood, education, work, and singlehood, which women of all ages and socio-economic groups now experience.

The second reality influencing our life styles, and which impacts on women in particular ways, is the fact of inflation, in the context of affluence. Few middle-class American families can "make it", at present, with only one person in the family employed. For reasons which are primarily economic and value-linked, women are entering and re-entering the work force in unprecedented numbers.

Some interesting data is, as follows:

- More than 40% of the work force is female.
- 50% to 60% of all women in the work force are married, not welfare recipients or single heads of households.
- More than 50% of all women now are employed, either part-time or full-time.
- Less than 15% of American families are "typical nuclear families", with one male breadwinner providing for female and minor dependents.

Looking at these data, some overall trends are obvious:

- Increasing numbers of women will simultaneously carry on roles of wife, mother, and worker in the future.
- Working women will desire and need increased amounts of training and education as they progress up the career ladders and salary scales.
- Employment simply adds to women's responsibilities and does not diminish their roles as wives and mothers, making time-, resource-, and energy-management skills essential.
- Women returning to the work force after some years of childrearing will be significantly "behind" men in their career development patterns.
- Women between the ages of 35 and 45 returning to work may exhibit patterns of adult development and career maturity which are typically observable in men between 25 and 35.
- Most women will, in the course of their lifetime, be alone for some time and will need to rely on their own resources for basic survival. Whether due to delayed marriage, choices to remain single, separation, divorce, or earlier death of the spouse, most women will be required to provide for their own economic (and psychological) independence at a variety of points in their lives.

College education for women, therefore, is neither frivolous nor superficial. It is not a matter of only "self-fulfillment" or "filling in time" in self-indulgent ways. It is the serious business of survival that is at stake.

In spite of these data and fast moving trends, women's socialization patterns continue to define women primarily as nurturers and responders to the needs of others. Self-assertion does not come easily for most women. And meeting one's own needs is still viewed as selfish and unfeminine.

Women's socialization in this culture has resulted in producing the following value norms for them:

- Collaborativeness, not competetiveness.
- Partnering, not individual achievement.
- Helping others, not working for one's own good.
- Relationship orientation, not title-bound with hierarchical orientations.
- Practical, not theoretical.
- Money conserving, not money-using
- "Selflessness", not self-oriented.
- Qualitative orientation, not quantitative orientation.
- Process-Orientation and expressive in style, not product instrumental orientation and objective in style.

In examining this list, some can see the "double edged sword" type of bind many women are caught in. While the culture, still male-oriented, professes support for the second set of values, women are socialized in opposite ways. Indeed, even those ego development scales and moral development scales[20] to which we refer as "adult" development imply a hierarchy of development which defines the most developed or mature person as "autonomous", "independent", and free of the constraints of others' definitions of the self.

Since schools, colleges and universities are no less free from these larger cultural norms than are any of our other institutions, it becomes important to examine our institutional objectives in terms of their relevance to women. Some challenging questions can be posed in thinking about the new opportunities offered to us as we design educational programs for adults and, at the same time, begin to define those attitudes, skills, and values which appear to be needed for cultural survival and "quality of life" in the future. Ironically, many of the characteristics now attributed to women and considered feminine are those very characteristics which are being identified as being necessary for our future survival as a people. A "conflict of values" is surely apparent, and ambivilance and confusion appear rampant.

Some of the questions which need to be posed by institutions and persons designing programs for adults (the majority of whom are women) are:

- Do women have to become like men to succeed in academe and the work world?
- Can the presence of women change our institutions and work places for the better?
- How can colleges help women gain the skills and self-confidence to alter our institutional management systems and humanize the world of work?
- How can colleges identify and credit the skills and knowledge that women have gained through non-classroom and non-traditional learning?
- How can women be prepared for leadership roles as opposed to subservient roles?
- Where are the role models for women in higher education? Who are the Department Chairpersons? Who are the Project Directors? Who are the Deans? Who are the Presidents? Where does the power reside? Who are

the faculty members in adult programs? And How do needs for role models and mentors for women impact on our program designs?

And, finally, we now recognize a need to engage in serious research to explore the adult development theories as they relate to women. Assumptions made about women's transitions, ego development, moral development, phases and stages which are based on studies of men simply will not do. The higher education programs designed to serve adults offer potentially rich reservoirs of knowledge and insight. And, as we proceed to discover "what is?" given our particular culture and time in history, we should not forget to ask, "What might be?" for the "quality of life" issues which promise to dominate our thinking over the next twenty years, to the year 2000 A.D., seem inextricably bound up with many of those values and characteristics we now attribute to women and to their socialization. In our quest for equity, we need to take care not to "throw the baby out with the bath water" and thereby lose a precious and vital dimension of our culture -- that which is typically seen as "feminine".

THE CHALLENGE

One perspective on the trends of the past few decades and a projection into the future is this:

The 1960's were an era of access and choice. During this period, characterized mainly as the "civil rights era", previously disenfranchised groups of persons in our society sought access to the fruits of mainstream American life. In all arenas of domestic concern, people clamored for "a way in". Overt conflict with and challenge to our institutions created new legislation to insure the rights of access to each American. This was a time devoted to laying the legal groundwork for equality of opportunity.

Toward the end of the '60's, the issues catalyzed by the Vietnam War caused a major examination of our values and lifestyles. With access and choice legally protected, we questioned the meaning of that access and choice and sought to re-organize our institutions and agencies to insure Equity. Throughout the '70's, the women's movement, the aftermath of Vietnam and the disillusionments of Watergate combined to give us a sense of drift.

As we enter the '80's, it appears that we are now concerned with issues of quality. Both the media and our provate conversations are dominated with concerns such as: the quality of education, the quality of life, the quality of the environment, the quality of work, and the quality of relationships. What may, on the surface, appear to be a continuance of confusion, conservatism, and pessimism seems actually to be a hopeful articulation of values, focusing on our concern for the meaning of our affluence and opportunity.

If we accept this analysis, and if we organize ourselves to increase the quality of our lives, then the '90's may be a decade of humanism and technology. For we are

beginning to get a handle on what the relationships between technological advanced and humanistic values must be in order to avert society's domination by non-humanistic science and bureaucratic complexity.

The sociological pendulum continues its cyclical swings. We have conflict, legislative resolution, administrative re-organization, implementation, and new issues which cause yet another conflict. These societal stages and transitions are not unlike those we experience throughout our own individual adult lives. A developmental perspective is useful in interpreting societal changes as well as individual change.

Each decade, each transition, therefore, brings with it a sense of crisis, but also may be viewed optimistically as a period of learning opportunity. It is this optimistic view of change as learning and opportunity which must dominate education. Only in this way will we be able to pursue education as an enterprise of hope, rooted in an optimism about our future as individuals and as a Society.

It is my belief that the most significant and ongoing questions in life in every decade and era are, and always have been:

"Who am I?"

"To what groups do I belong?", and

"How do I function?"

Self, others, and work. These are the philosophical preoccupations of human life. Each of our lives are made up of the search for the answers to these questions. The search is never-ending; and the answers keep changing, as we move through each life phase, each life stage, and each life transition.

If colleges and schools are going to be effective and successful (in fulfilling their missions in attracting and serving adults), they will have to aid young people and adults in their searches for the answers to these questions.

To do less -- to develop purely instrumental, expedient curriculum which leads only to a certificate of attendance without providing for the processes and relationships that matter significantly -- is to miss the whole point.

We must pay attention to child growth and development, to youth seeking maturity, to adult development and adult transitions, to our own needs and those of our peers, and to the transitions in the society around us. And if we can do this well, we will be living our own rhetoric of life-long learning. We will then be able to create institutions that truly matter in peoples' lives. We will be able to impact on the quality of life in America. An we will then move toward creating a true learning society, capable of coping with an uncertain and complex future, combining our humanism with our technology.

If we can learn how to do this, we will insure that the educator's role in Equal Rights will be one of bringing a new authenticity of quality to our inherent equality.